

BIRTHPLACE

DANIEL WEBSTER



Franklin

New Hampshire



BIRTHPLACE
of
DANIEL WEBSTER
Franklin, New Hampshire.



BRIEF STORY OF ITS RESTORATION
AND PRESENTATION TO THE STATE
SECOND EDITION

1922

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DANIEL WEBSTER

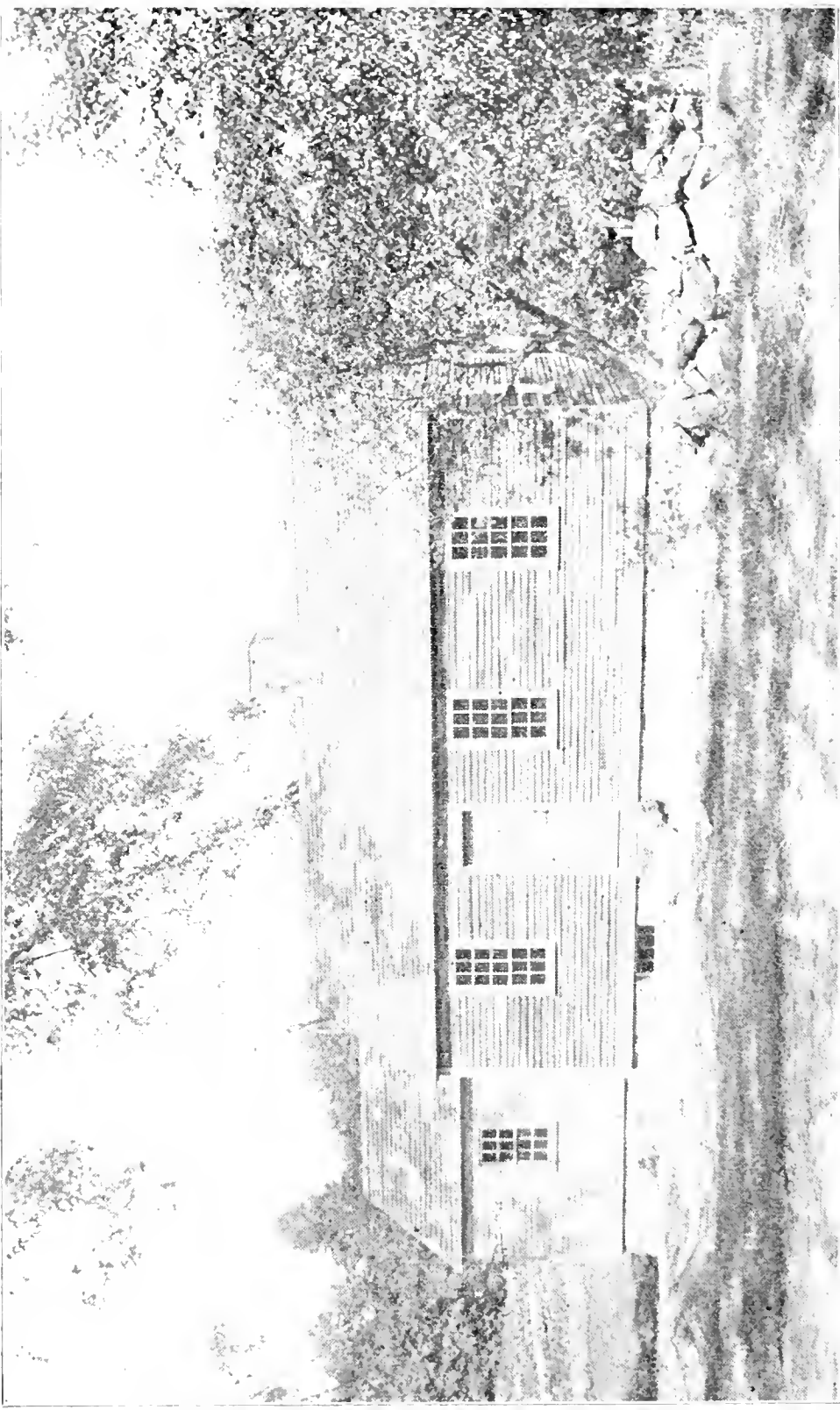


After the peace of 1763, a company from Kingston, N. H., was given a grant of land which they named Stevenstown. It was situated on the west banks of the Merrimack and Pemigewasset rivers. Opposite its eastern boundry this last named river united with the Winnipесау-kee and formed the Merrimack. This grant bordered on these rivers for four miles and extended westward to Kearsarge mountain. Later it was called Salisbury, and the eastern part of the grant was taken in 1826 as a part of the new town of Franklin.

One of the members of this party was Ebenezer Webster. His ancestors settled in Hampton, N. H., some sixteen years after the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. Mr. Webster had already distinguished himself in the various conflicts which raged at that time, and had attained the rank of Captain. At the time of coming to the new township he was married, but had no children. It fell to the lot of this young couple to draw a

plot of land on the northern boundary of the township, and when Mr. Webster had built his log cabin, there was no white inhabitant to the north until Canada was reached. It was probably in 1764 that Mr. Webster built this cabin beside a brook at the foot of a broad meadow. The land was not very fertile, and to assist in obtaining a living a saw mill was built and power obtained by a dam which covered with water a part of the broad meadow.

Here five children were born, and at the end of ten years the mother succumbed to hard labor, scanty fare and rigorous climate. Mr. Webster was much discouraged. He sadly felt the need of a motherly woman to care for his little ones. The story is told that some of his fellow townsmen advised him of a woman living in Newburyport near the mouth of the Merrimack, who would make him a good wife. Mr. Webster left his children in the care of a good neighbor and mounting his horse went back to his former home. The next morning he called at the home of Miss Abigail Eastman, told her of his home and condition, said he had no time for a courtship, but would she marry him and return to Salisbury at once? She consented, and the second morning, riding on the horse behind her husband, she started for her new home. Whether or



Restored Building, Front View.

not this story is true, it is a matter of record that she made him a good wife, became the mother of five children, one of them the greatest citizen ever born in the Granite state.

A few years after he built a small, two room, frame house. He did this before the birth of Daniel as we learn from a statement of the latter that it was not his privilege to be born in a log cabin, as it was that of his brother Ezekiel. Ebenezer Webster is described as a man of great power, one who, had he received an education, would have risen high in official position. But he says that he never entered a school house for the purpose of study. He was, however, far from being an ignorant man. Not only could he read and write, but he acquired considerable knowledge, understood law, and served for several years as judge of Hillsborough county.

By his first wife he had five children. Two of these died young. The others were Susannah, who married John Colby and lived in the brick house, the last house in Franklin on the state road to Hill, and now a part of the Golden Rule Farm Homes; David and Joseph.

The children of the second wife were also five in number, and named Mehitable, Abigail, Ezekiel, Daniel and Sarah. All of the children, except the two last, were born in the log cabin.

The site of this cabin was marked by a stone claiming to be the real site of Daniel Webster's birth. This stone was set after the death of Judge George W. Nesmith, and by request made before his death. It was set without careful investigation, and the real site was not fully discovered and proved until after the Webster Birthplace association was formed, and the work of restoration undertaken.

Soon after the birth of Daniel, the exact date being in doubt and variously stated as from one to three years, Captain Webster bought a farm at what is now called Webster Place, and moved from the hills to the intervale of the Merrimack river. G. T. Curtis, in his *Life of Daniel Webster*, gives the date as 1783. However that may be, it is known that the Captain retained the ownership of the original farm for several years and conducted there the saw mill which he had built. This saw mill was on the brook easterly of the birthplace. The stone foundation of the mill and of the abutments of the dam are now plainly discernable. A part of the old upright saw which was used in this mill has been unearthed and is now in the restored house.

This little sketch will not allow of an extended history of Daniel. Suffice it to say that he learned to read at his mother's knee, and with the aid of older

sisters. He has said that he cannot remember when he could not read the Bible. He was a great reader, and eagerly devoured the books found in a small circulating library belonging in the town of Salisbury, and later the books in a similar library in Boscawen, where he was prepared for college by Rev. Samuel Wood. Previous to this he had part of two years at Exeter Academy. He entered Dartmouth College in 1797 when he was fifteen years old. He very much wished that his brother, Ezekiel, might have a college education, and after graduation he accepted the position of principal of the academy in Fryeburg, Maine, receiving as salary \$350. He paid his living expenses by copying deeds and other documents, and turned a good part of his year's salary over to his brother. He commenced the study of law and in 1804 went to Boston where he entered the law office of Christopher Gore. Soon he was offered the position as clerk of Hillsborough county, and his father very much desired him to accept, but Daniel wisely decided that he would rather earn his living by making papers than to copy those made by others, and much to the disappointment of his father, he returned to Boston. His father said to him, "Your mother always said you would amount to something or nothing. I think it will be nothing." After admis-

sion to the bar in New Hampshire, he opened an office in Boscaawen, where for about two years he met with but indifferent success and soon went to Portsmouth. Here he was well matched by another great man, Jeremiah Mason. From Portsmouth he was first elected to Congress and at once took his place among the leaders of his party.

In 1816 he removed to Boston, determined to give up politics and devote himself to business. But again he was chosen by the people to represent Massachusetts in Congress, and here he commenced to deliver those remarkable orations which will endure so long as the United States remains a nation. In 1826 he was chosen United States Senator and in 1830 he made that speech in reply to Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina which was heralded as one of the greatest efforts ever given in the National Capital.

While living in Boston and Washington, Mr. Webster held his home at the Webster Place, it being his father's farm. It was not until 1824 that he first saw the Thomas Farm at Marshfield, Mass., which he later procured as his home, and where he died October 24, 1852. Thus we see that over half of his life was passed with his real home in New Hampshire, and after acquiring the home in Marshfield he retained his interest in

the Elms Farm, spent his vacations there and greatly enjoyed fishing in the pretty sheet of water in Franklin, now called after him, Webster lake.

Daniel Webster was twice married, his first wife being Grace Fletcher, daughter of Rev. Elijah Fletcher of Hopkinton. It does not appear that they made much of courtship, but were married at Salisbury, June 24, 1808. Twenty years later Mrs. Webster died, January 21, 1828, and Daniel is said to have made the statement that never after could he write her name without tears coming to his eyes.

It was in 1830 that Daniel Webster came into full possession of the Elms Farm. While he greatly enjoyed the farm and its surroundings, yet there was a tinge of sadness connected with it as here his parents as well as brothers and sisters were buried. The graves of his parents were suitably marked a few years ago with a huge boulder, through the efforts of Abigail Webster Chapter, D. A. R., of Franklin. In December, 1829, Mr. Webster was married a second time to Miss Caroline Le Roy, the daughter of a wealthy merchant in New York City.

According to Curtis, Daniel Webster had five children: Grace Fletcher, born April 29, 1810, died January 23, 1817, aged 7 years.

Julia, married S. A. Appleton of Boston, born January 16, 1818, died April 28, 1848.

Edward, born July 20, 1820, died January 23, 1848, aged 28 years.

Charles, born December 21, 1822, died December 18, 1824, aged 2 years.

Fletcher, born July 23, 1813, was the only one of his children living at the time of Mr. Webster's death. He had a home near his father's in Marshfield.

There are many interesting anecdotes of Mr. Webster as a boy and man. Those in his young life were connected with his residence in Salisbury, now Franklin. One of interest is that when about four years old, he went with his father to the farm which was first owned, and while there his father thought to catch a mess of trout. Just below the bridge is a big rock, and as father and son climbed upon this rock, Daniel asked if he "might catch a fish." The rod was placed in his hands and the bait dropped into the stream. A big trout took the hook, and instead of Daniel pulling the fish out of the water, the fish pulled Daniel in. His father caught him, and pulling him out, found that the little lad still retained his hold upon the pole and at the end of the line was the big trout.

Another story is that at the age of 12 to 14, it was often his task to watch the big up and down saw cut its way through the big logs. It was a slow process and while the saw ate its way along, Daniel passed the time in profitable reading.

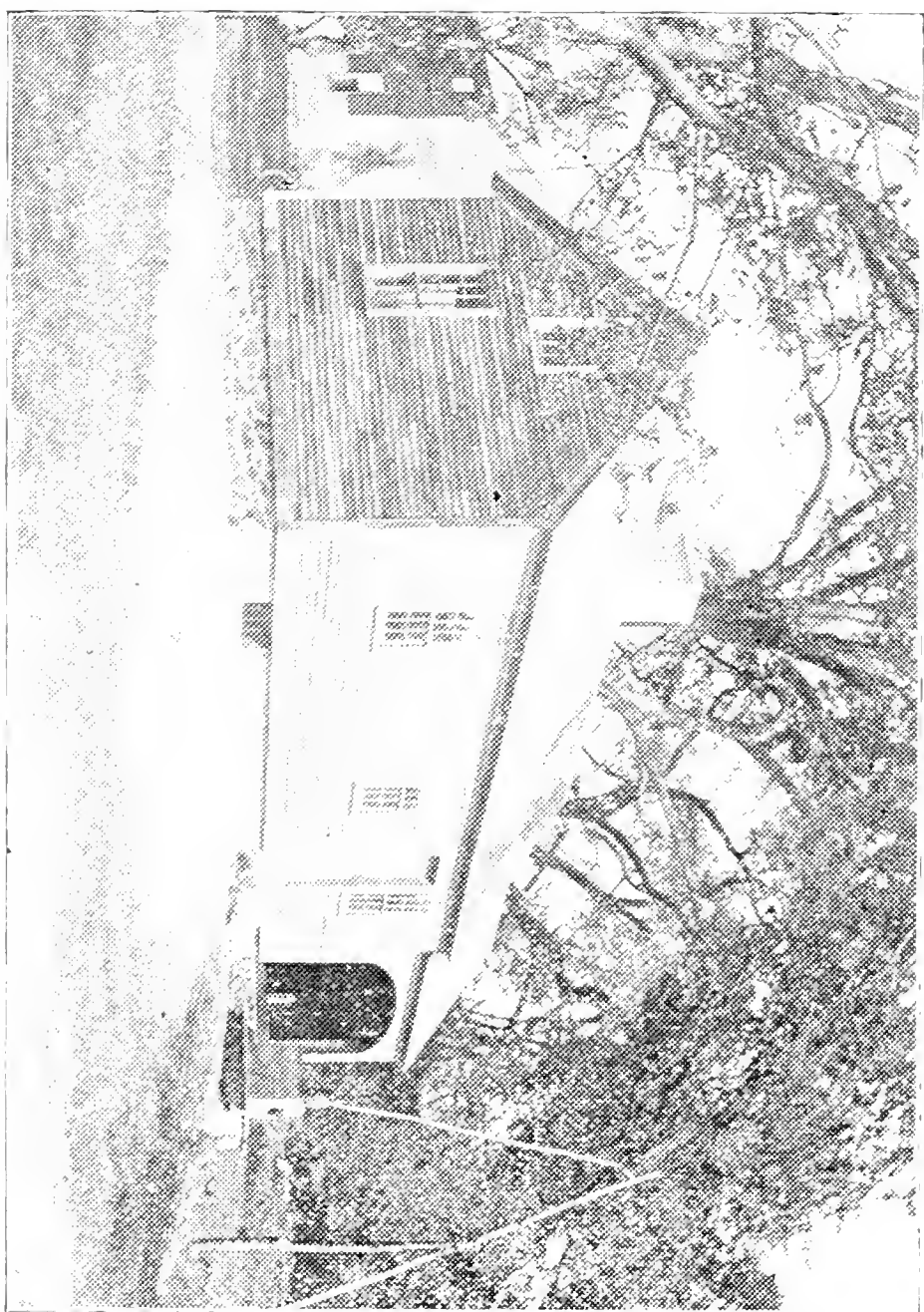
The story has often been told of his first plea. At the home on the river road there was a woodchuck which was making havoc of the good things in the family garden. It was decided that the marauder should be punished, and a box trap was set. The next day the woodchuck was in the trap, and Ezekiel was for killing the animal at once. Daniel objected, and the father said, he would be the Judge and the boys should argue the case. Ezekiel was first and put up a strong argument, showing the damage done and likely to be repeated, etc. Mr. Webster thought the case well presented, but waited to hear Daniel before rendering a decision. Daniel put up the plea that the animal had as much right to live as we have, that it did not know right from wrong, that it took its food in the natural way, without considering whether or not it was as nature provided, that it was weak, and he called attention to the pleading look in the eyes of the frightened animal. He had hardly concluded when his father shouted, "Zeke, you let that woodchuck go!"

The story of the scythe was one of great interest to all farmers' sons as well as to older people. It was haying time, and in those days there were no mowing machines and all grass was cut with scythes. Mr. Webster rigged up a scythe and snath and giving it to Daniel sent

him into the field. The day was hot, the grass stout and heavy, and the boy soon tired of the work. Coming to an oak tree that stood beside the highway he hooked the scythe over a low limb and reclined upon the new mown hay. At noon his father asked him how his scythe hung, and the immediate reply was, "It hangs just right to suit me."

It is an interesting fact that as a school boy in Exeter, Daniel could never "speak a piece" before the school. Often he would commit a declamation to memory, but when called upon to stand and deliver before the school, he could not do it.

Daniel Webster was of a strong religious mind. At the age of twenty-five he joined the church in Salisbury and his pew was retained until his death. Recently when the church was remodeled and new pews installed, the Webster pew was carefully taken out, and is now in one of the rooms of the Webster mansion, now the office building of the N. H. Orphans' Home. John Colby, who married Daniel's half sister, Susannah, was a very profane man. In course of time Mr. Colby became converted. Mr. Webster was greatly interested in this and made a journey to the Colby farm to see and talk with his brother-in-law. The meeting was ideal, and together these two men offered up their prayers to the God of the Universe.



Restored Building, Rear View.

In the second volume of the Life of Daniel Webster, George T. Curtis gives Mr. Webster's creed as follows:—

“‘Lord I believe, help Thou my unbelief.’

“Philosophical argument, especially that drawn from the vastness of the universe in comparison with the apparent insignificance of this globe, has sometimes shaken my reason for the faith that is in me; but my heart has assured, and reassured me, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be a Divine Reality.

“The Sermon on the Mount cannot be a merely human production. This belief enters into the very depth of my conscience. The whole history of man proves it.

Dan'l Webster.”

Mr. Webster was often mentioned as candidate for president, and as often disappointed in not receiving the nomination. It is thought that this disappointment may have hastened his death, although he never expected to attain to great age.

The end came at the home in Marshfield. He was confined to his bed but for a short time, and his vigorous mind was alert and capable to the last. He realized his condition, but faced the inevitable with courage and a firm faith in the future. Only one child survived him, Fletcher, and this son with

Mrs. Webster and a few intimate friends, were with him to the last. His death cast a gloom over the country second only to that which has been caused by the death in office of our highest rulers.

His will was written by George T. Curtis, and when it was brought to him he asked if Mrs. Webster and Fletcher would read it. Being told that they had, he asked if they were satisfied with it. Being assured by each that they were, he said, "Then let me sign now." He affixed his signature, and returning the pen said, "Thank God for strength to do a sensible act." In a few hours he had passed on.

According to Curtis his last words were, "I still live."

Mr. Webster was born in Salisbury, N. H., now Franklin, January 18, 1782, and died at Marshfield, Mass., October 24, 1852.

ORGANIZATION and WORK of the Daniel Webster Birthplace Ass'n.



January 18, 1904, was a cold winter night. The writer of this little sketch was coming up from Boston on the late train, when at Concord a stranger came in the car and said he had been in Franklin and had arranged to purchase the birthplace of Daniel Webster. He wished the deed executed that night, as it was the anniversary of the birth of the great statesman. When the train arrived in Franklin the thermometer marked four degrees below zero, but a team was procured and the two men drove to the birthplace, then owned by George H. Hosmer, and the deed was written and executed before midnight. The buyer was Arthur C. Jackson.

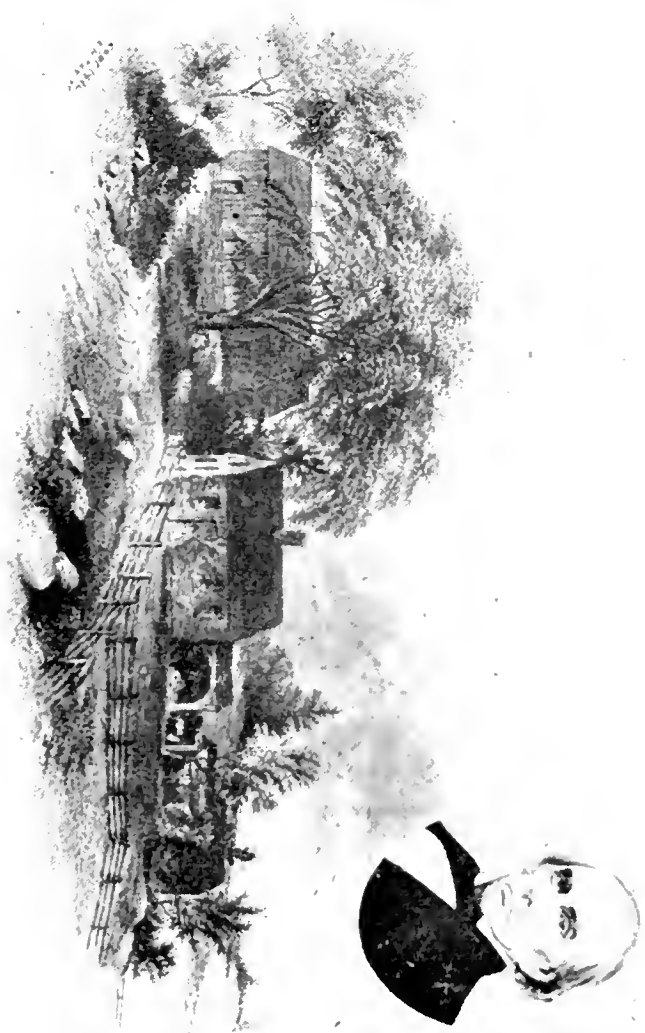
Three days later the Webster Birthplace association was formed in the office of Barron Shirley, in Franklin. There

were present Arthur C. Jackson, Omar A. Towne, Augustine R. Ayers, Barron Shirley and John W. Staples. Mr. Jackson was elected president, Dr. Staples, vice-president, Mr. Towne, clerk, and Mr. Ayers, treasurer.

It was Mr. Jackson's intention to take the buildings from the Birthplace and carry them to St. Louis to be erected on the grounds of the St. Louis Exposition, which was to be held the following summer.

There was much opposition to this and as there was a mortgage on the place, held by the Franklin Building & Loan association, which refused to allow the buildings to be moved, the plan was given up. Mr. Jackson did erect a building on the Exposition grounds patterned after the large house which was built about 1796 by Mr. Sawyer.

Mr. Jackson's venture was not a success and no payments were made on the mortgage note. The mortgage was finally foreclosed and the publication of that fact in daily and weekly papers of the state awakened an interest in Mr. Webster and his early life. The movement relative to forming a permanent organization for the preservation of the buildings and farm originated with the Franklin Board of Trade at its meeting March 14, 1910. A resolution was offered by Hon. Edward G. Leach and was



Sketch made by Lauman

adopted by unanimous vote. After a preamble defining its purposes the resolution directed the President of the Board to appoint a committee.

The resolution was as follows: "Resolved—That a committee of nine citizens of Franklin and vicinity be selected, of whom the president shall be one, and the others selected by him, as a committee to consider and formulate such plan of action as they may consider most appropriate for the accomplishment of the desired object."

The committee appointed was Chief Justice Frank N. Parsons, ex-Senator William E. Chandler, Senator Jacob H. Gallinger, Hon. John R. Eastman, Hon. Edward G. Leach, Hon. Alvah W. Sulloway, Hon. Clarence E. Carr, Hon. Omar A. Towne and Dr. John W. Staples, then president of the Board of Trade.

It was not until October 26, of the same year that a permanent organization was perfected, with articles of association duly drawn and officers elected. The meeting at which this was done was held in the office of Hon. Frank N. Parsons, and the officers were as follows:

President, Hon. William E. Chandler of Concord.

First Vice-President, Hon. Frank N. Parsons of Franklin.

Treasurer, Dr. John W. Staples of Franklin.

Secretary, Omar A. Towne of Franklin.

A committee on membership was appointed consisting of Alvah W. Sullo-way, Edward G. Leach, Augustine R. Ayers, Clarence E. Carr and Omar A. Towne. Steps were immediately taken to raise sufficient funds to purchase the farm, repair the large house and restore the small frame house which was built by Ebenezer Webster about 1781.

A part of this house was standing, being used as a shed, or ell attached to the large two story house built by Mr. Sawyer.

The first essential was to locate permanently the original site of the house in which Daniel Webster was born. To aid in this the association had the statement of Mr. Webster as published in George T. Curtis' Life of Daniel Webster. On page 5 of Volume 1, of said history, it was found stated in a foot note, "A sketch of the house in which Mr. Webster was born, drawn by Charles Lanman, Esq., and sanctioned by Mr. Webster, is prefixed to the first volume of his works."

In excavating for the foundation of the original house it was found that the sketch by Mr. Lanman was practically correct, except that it was made to face the same way as was the large barn, whereas the foundations were found to

run the long way at right angles to those of the barn.

These foundations were found to have been pried into the cellar around the top, and the cellar filled with debris. The foundations were broken down about two feet below the surface of the ground. The lower part now is exactly as excavated. The stones which had been pried into the cellar were found, as were the bricks with which the chimney and fireplace were remade, and the large hearthstone, showing the effects of fire, now used in front of the fireplace. The door stone was also found in the cellar.

The original part of the cottage was removed from its connection with the large house and the other half restored in accord with the Lanman drawing, and in conformity with the discovered foundation.

The restored house is nearly one-half the original building, and the other half is made to conform in lumber and carpentry, as nearly as possible with the original building.

Mr. Webster was born in the south room, and the living room was where the fireplace now is. One can readily see that so small a house could be thoroughly warmed in the coldest weather, when the bricks in the large fireplace were heated.

When sufficient money had been raised and the buildings restored, August 28,

1909, was set for due celebration of the Restoration of the Birth Place House of Daniel Webster. Large numbers came from this and other states. Over three thousand people attended the ceremony.

To the regret of all interested, Mr. Chandler could not be present owing to illness. Hon. Frank N. Parsons presided and addresses were made by Ernest Fox Nichols, President of Dartmouth College, Hon. Samuel W. McCall of Massachusetts, Senator Jacob H. Gallinger of Concord, Hon. Samuel E. Pingree of Hartford, Vt., Hon. David H. Cross of Manchester, Hon. Nahum J. Bachelder of Andover, Rev. Arthur Little of Newtonville, Mass., and Hon. Clarence E. Carr of Andover. The address prepared by Hon. William E. Chandler was read by Hon. George H. Moses of Concord. The invocation prayer was by Rev. R. P. Gardner, and the closing benediction by Rev. H. C. McDougall of Franklin.

The title of the Birthplace remained in the Webster Birth Place association until September 24, 1917, when it was voted to present the same to the state of New Hampshire. The deed of transfer was drawn by Chief Justice Frank N. Parsons, and the state accepted the gift.

At the present time, 1922, the representative of the state in the care of the Birthplace is Warren F. Daniell and the caretaker is Harry E. Merrill.

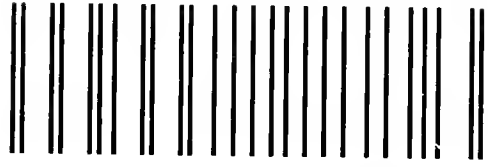


Ex-Senator William E. Chandler.

Great credit must be given to ex-Senator William E. Chandler for the successful carrying out of plans for the restoration and subsequent presentation of the Birth Place to the state. He was indefatigable in his efforts to raise the necessary funds to have the work well done and to induce the state officials to accept the trust.



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